

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 3168

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PA, OAS

SUBJECT: UNDERSECRETARY OF INTERIOR ON LAINO CASE, IAHR

VISIT, RELEASE OF PRISONERS, STATE OF SIEGE

SUMMARY: U.S. OFFICIALS CALLED ON INTERIOR MINISTRY UNDERSECRETARY AUGUST 2 AND WERE ASSURED GOP PLANS TO RELEASE LAINO SOON AND WILL TAKE EARLY ACTION TO FIX IAHR VISIT, RELEASE LAST POLITICAL PRISONERS AND END STATE OF SIEGE. END SUMMARY.

1. ACCOMPANIED BY NEW DCM, ARA/ECA DIRECTOR DESIGNATE KLAUS RUSER CALLED ON DR. MIGUEL ANGEL BESTARD, UNDERSECRETARY OF INTERIOR AND KEY MINISTRY OFFICIAL, MORNING OF AUGUST 2. FOLLOWING INTRODUCTIONS, BESTARD SPOKE EARNESTLY FOR MOST OF NEXT 45 MINUTES ON MAIN ISSUES CREATING FRICTION BETWEEN GOP AND USG, ASSURING RUSER THAT REALIZATION WAS STRONG THROUGHOUT PARAGUAYAN GOVERNMENT THAT HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY OF CARTER ADMINISTRATION REPRESENTED BASIC VALUES OF AMERICAN PEOPLE AND THAT BROAD SHIFT IN WORLD OPINION WAS FOCUSING POWERFUL ATTENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS IN PARAGUAY.

2. BESTARD SAID GOP WAS ANXIOUS TO CORRECT ITS NEGATIVE IMAGE AND HE WAS PERSONALLY CERTAIN EARLY ACTION WOULD BE TAKEN TO RESOLVE ALL THREE OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS - DATE FOR IAHR VISIT, RELEASE OF REMAINING UNTRIED POLITICAL PRISONERS (HE SAID ONLY 17 WERE LEFT) AND LIFTING OF STATE OF SIEGE
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WHICH REMAINS IN EFFECT ONLY IN ASUNCION. KEEPING STATE OF SEIGE IN ASUNCION AFTER LIFTING IT ELSEWHERE WAS REQUIRED TO JUSTIFY DETAINING REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS, BESTARD EXPLAINED, AND ONCE LAST ONES WERE RELEASED IT WOULD END. HE SAID HE COULD NOT GUARANTEE WHEN THOSE THREE STEPS WOULD BE TAKEN, BUT SPEAKING AS A LAWYER AND COLORADO PARTY OFFICIAL, RATHER THAN DEPUTY TO INTERIOR MINISTER, HE

COULD PROMISE POSITIVE RESULTS IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE. BESTARD SAID GOP WAS SLOW TO UNDERSTAND THRUST OF U.S. POLICY ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND U.S. COULD HAVE BEEN MORE UNDERSTANDING OF PARAGUAY'S LONG HISTORY OF CIVIL STRIFE BUT HIGHEST OFFICIALS OF GOP WERE ANXIOUS TO RESOLVE CURRENT FRICTIONS WITH US. AND HE WAS CERTAIN EARLY POSITIVE ACTIONS WERE GUARANTEED. HE HASTENED TO ADD, HOWEVER, THAT HE COULD NOT MAKE SURE A PERSONAL GUARANTEE IF SOME ACT OF TERRORISM SUCH AS THE LAMBRUSCHINI BOMBING IN BUENOS AIRES OCCURRED HERE.

3. ON LAINO CASE, HE WAS APOLIGETIC AND CLEARLY NOT IN SYMPATHY WITH WAY GOP HAD HANDLED AFFAIR, NOTING LAINO HAD DONE EVERYTHINS TO DEFY GOVERNMENT AND ASSURE HIS DETENTION ON RETURN BUT GOP FEEL INTO TRAP AND HELPED MAKE MARTYR AND WORLD FAMOUS OPPOSITION LEADER OUT OF SOMEONE WHO HAD LITTLE LOCAL SUPPORT. AGAIN, BESTARD SAID HE COULD NOT PERSONALLY GUARANTEE PROMPT RELEASE OF LAINO "WITHIN EIGHT DAYS" BUT AS LAWYER HE WAS CONVINCED CASE AGAINST LAINO WAS FEEBLE AND JUDGE WOULD FREE HIM PENDING FURTHER INVESTIGATION. AT SEVERAL POINTS IN CONVERSATIONS, BESTARD REPEATED "PERSONAL CONVICTION" THAT LAINO WOULD BE OUT OF JAIL VERY SOON.

4. RUSER SPOKE FIRMLY IN SUPPORT OF COURSE OF ACTION BESTARD OUTLINED AND ASSURED HIM USG WAS ANXIOUS TO CONTINUE LONGSTANDING COOPERATION WITH PARAGUAY ONCE REAL PROGRESS CONFIDENTIAL

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CLEAR IN HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD. HIS NEW TASKS IN WASHINGTON WOULD BE FAR MORE AGREEABLE IF CURRENT DIFFICULTIES COULD BE OVERCOME QUICKLY.

5. BESTARD REFERRED TO THE DEMONSTRATION AT THE U.S. EMBASSY AS WORK OF MISGUIDED POLITICAL ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH EXTREME VIEWPOINT IN COLORADO PARTY. HE SAID MILITANTS, PARTICULARLY IN RURAL AREAS, TENDED TO BE NATIONALISTIC AND POORLY INFORMED. THEY WERE PUTTING SOME PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT TO RESIST DEMOCRATIZATION CALLED FRO ABROAD BUT GOVERNMENT'S COURSE WAS CLEAR- IT WOULD MOVE FORWARD IN STAGES TOWARD GREATER PLOITICAL PARTICIPATION, FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND PRESS, ORDERLY LEGAL PROCEDURES TO ASSURE STATE SECURITY AND RELEASE OF ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS. HE REITERATED PERSONAL CONVICTION LAINO AFFAIR WOULD SOON BE RESOLVED AND THAT EARLY ACTION ON IAHRC VISIT, PRISONER RELEASES AND LIFTING OF STATE OF SEIGE COULD ALL BE EXPECTED IN NEAR FUTURE.

6. COMMENT: BESTARD IS ONE OF GOP OFFICIALS MOST ANXIOUS TO END DEPLORABLE PRACTICES THAT GIVE GOVERNMENT A BAD NAME ABROAD BUT HE HAS OCCASIONALLY BEEN OVER-OPTIMISTIC ABOUT TIMEABLE AND, ON OCCASION, HAS BEEN

MISLED BY SENIOR OFFICIALS INTO PROVIDING INACCURATE
ASSESSMENTS TO FOREIGN OFFICIALS. IN THIS CASE, WE
HOPE HIS PREDICTIONS COME TRUE AND, RE LAINO, WE ARE HEARING
MORE RUMORS THAT JUDGE WILL SUSPEND CASE WITHOUT PRONOUNCING
SENTENCE, PERHAPS EARLY NEXT WEEK.
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